

Millions fooled by 'hoax' Animal Planet documentary on mermaids

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The Animal Planet special documentary that claimed to prove the existence of mermaids, was nothing but a man-made hoax, it has been revealed.

'Mermaids: The New Evidence', which aired on Sunday in the UK, reeled in a record 3.6 million viewers - the largest in the network's 17-year history, News.com.au reported.

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Biologist Dr Paul Roberton returned in the "mocumentary", claiming to reveal never-before-seen footage of the assumed mythical creatures swimming in the Greenland Sea.

After it was broadcast, 1.5million streams of mermaid-related video surfaced online, while Twitter erupted with posts about the show and the purported existence of mermaids.

Animal Planet's president and general manager Marjorie Kaplan said: "The phenomenon of mermaids has truly been a watershed-and a water-cooler - moment for Animal Planet. These extraordinary television specials have electrified, challenged and entertained television audiences and online fans alike."

However many viewers failed to catch the blink-and-you'll-miss-it disclaimer towards the end which described the program as "science fiction" based on "scientific theory".

The two-hour feature was created off the back of the success of last year's 'Mermaids: The Body Found', which grabbed the cable channel's strongest ratings since the death of Steve Irwin in 2006.

It featured an exclusive interview with a man claiming to be a former scientist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

The "scientist" was in fact an actor.

Executive producer of the controversial show, Charlie Foley, said they wanted viewers to believe that it was real, hence the documentary- style.

"We wanted people to approach the story with a sense of possibility and a sense of wonder. Hopefully that's what Mermaids allowed viewers to do...allowed them to suspend their disbelief", he told ABC News.

NOAA's also released a statement on its website explaining: "Mermaids: The New Evidence is just entertainment. No evidence of aquatic humanoids has ever been found."